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THE ALBANY DEPOT

BY

W·D·HOWELLS·

HARPER'S BLACK & WHITE SERIES

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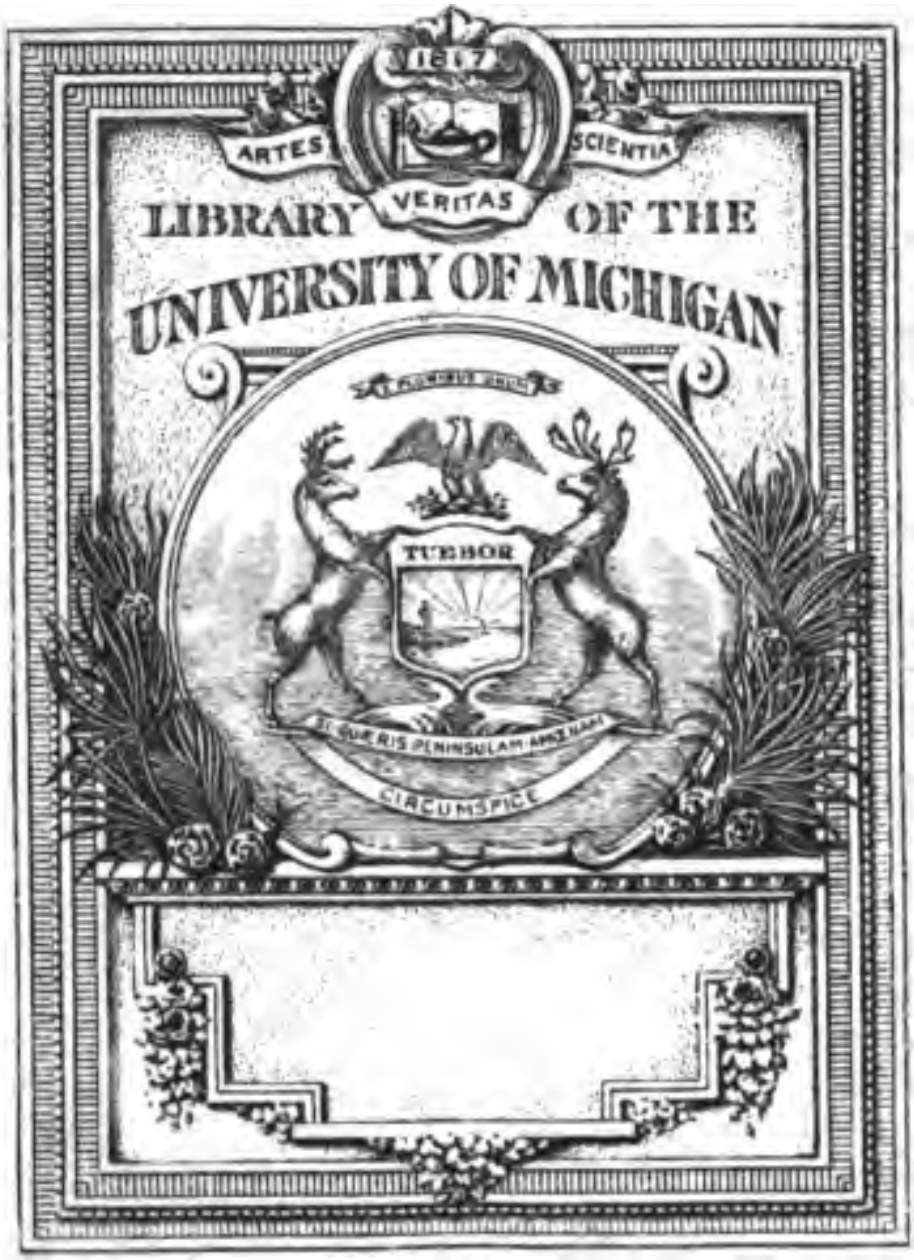

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THE ALBANY DEPOT

BY

W. D. HOWELLS

NEW YORK

HARPER AND BROTHERS

1892

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"'Sure it's no bad joke on ye, sor.'"

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Sunday at a cousin's of Mrs. McIlheny's." He shakes hands with Roberts and Campbell, and runs out, followed by his wife.

IV

ROBERTS AND CAMPBELL

Campbell: "Distinguished public character. Well, we're out of that, Roberts. I had to crowd the truth a little for you, but I fetched the belligerent McIlheny. What are you going in for next?"

Roberts: "I—upon my word, I haven't the least idea. I think I shall give up trying to identify the cook. Agnes must do it herself when she comes here."

Campbell: "Oh no! *That* won't do, old fellow. The cook may come here and give you the slip before Agnes gets back."

Roberts: "What would you do?"

Campbell: "Well, I don't know; I don't like to advise, exactly; but it seems to me you've got to keep trying. You've got to keep your eye out for respectable

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butter-balls, and not let them slip through your fingers."

Roberts: "You mean, go up and speak to them? I *couldn't* do that again."

Campbell: "Well, of course you didn't make a howling success with Mrs. McIlheny; but it wasn't a dead-failure either. But you must use a little more diplomacy — lead up to the subject gently. Don't go and ask a woman if she's a cook, or had an appointment to meet a gentleman here. *That* won't do. I'll tell you! You might introduce the business by asking if she had happened to see a lady coming in or going out; and then describe Agnes, and say you had expected to meet her here. And she'll say she hadn't seen her here, but such a lady had just engaged her as a cook. And then you'll say you're the lady's husband, and you're sure she'll be in in a moment. And there you are! That's the way you ought to have worked it with Mrs. McIlheny. Then it would have come out all right."

Roberts, pessimistically: "I don't see how it would have made her the cook."

Campbell: "It couldn't have done that,

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of course; but it would have done everything short of that. But we're well enough out of it, anyway. It was mighty lucky I came in with my little amendment just when I did. There's all the difference in the world between asking a lady whether she *is* a cook and whether she's *seen* a cook. That difference just saved the self-respect of the McIlhenys, and saved your life. It gave the truth a slight twist in the right direction. You can't be too careful about the truth, Roberts. You can't offer it to people in the crude state; it's got to be prepared. If you'd carried it through the way I wanted you to, the night you and old Bemis garroted each other, you'd have come out perfectly triumphant. What you want is not the *real* truth, but the *ideal* truth; not what you *did*, but what you *ought* to have done. Heigh? Now, you see, those McIlhenys have gone off with their susceptibilities in perfect repair, simply because I substituted a *for* for an *if*, and made you inquire *for* a cook instead of *if* she was a cook. Perhaps you did ask for instead of ask if?"

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Roberts: "No, no. I asked her if she *was* a cook."

Campbell: "Well, I'm glad the McIlhenys had too much sense to believe that. They're happy, anyway. They're enjoying the hobble that you and Agnes are in, with lofty compassion. They—hello! here's that fellow coming back again!"

Roberts: "Who? Which? Where?" He starts nervously about, and confronts Mr. McIlheny bearing down upon him with a countenance of provisional severity.

McIlheny: "Just wan word more wid you, sor. Mrs. McIlheny has been thinkun' it oover, and she says you didn't ask her if she was after *seeun'* a cuke, but whether she was after *beun'* a cuke? Now, sor, which wahs ut? Out wid ut! Don't be thinkun' ye can throw dust in our eyes because we're Irishmen!" A threatening tone prevails in Mr. McIlheny's address at the mounting confusion and hesitation in Roberts. "Come! are ye deef, mahn?"

Roberts, in spite of Campbell's dumbshow inciting him to fiction: "I—I—if you will kindly step apart here, I can ex-

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plain. I was very confused when I spoke to Mrs. McIlheny."

McIlheny, following him and Willis into the corner: "Fwhat made ye take my wife for a cuke? Did she luke anny more like a cuke than yer own wife? Her family is the best in County Mayo. Her father kept six cows, and she never put her hands in wather. And ye come up to her in a public place like this, where ye're afraid to spake aboove yer own breath, and ask her if she's after beun' the cuke yer wife's engaged. Fwhat do ye mane by ut?"

Roberts: "My dear sir, I know—I can understand how it seems offensive; but I can assure you that I had no intention —no—no—" he falters, with an imploring glance at Campbell, who takes the word.

Campbell: "Look here, Mr. McIlheny, you can appreciate the feelings of a gentleman situated as my friend was here. He had to meet a lady whom he had never seen before, and didn't know by sight; and we decided—Mrs. McIlheny was so pleasant and kindly looking—that

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he should go and ask her if she had seen a lady of the description he was looking for, and—"

McIlheny: "Yessor! I can appreciate ahl *that*. But fwhy did he ask her if *she* was the lady? Fwhy did he ask her if she was a cuke? That's what I wannt to know!"

Campbell: "Well, now, I'm sure you can understand that. He was naturally a good deal embarrassed at having to address a strange lady; his mind was full of his wife's cook, and instead of asking her if she'd *seen* a cook, he bungled and he blundered, and asked her—I suppose —if she *was* a cook. Can't you see that? how it would happen?"

McIlheny, with conviction: "Yessor, I can. And I'll feel it an hannor if you gintlemen will join me in a glass of wine on the carner, across the way—"

Campbell: "But your train?"

McIlheny: "Oh, domn the thrain! But I'll just stip aboord and tell Mrs. McIlheny I've met a frind, an' I'll be out by the next thrain, an' I'll be back wid you

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in a jiffy." He runs out, and Campbell turns to Roberts.

Roberts: "Good heavens, Willis! what are we going to do? Surely, we can't go out and drink with this man?"

Campbell: "I'm afraid we sha'n't have the pleasure. I'm afraid Mrs. McIlheny is of a suspicious nature; and when Mr. Mac comes back, it'll be to offer renewed hostility instead of renewed hospitality. I don't see anything for us but flight, Roberts. Or, *you* can't fly, you poor old fellow! You've got to stay and look out for that cook. I'd be glad to stay for you, but, you see, I should not know her."

Roberts: "I don't know her either, Willis. I was just thinking whether you couldn't manage this wretched man rather better alone. I—I'm afraid I confuse you; and he gets things out of me —admissions, you know—"

Campbell: "No, no! Your moral support is everything. That lie of mine is getting whittled away to nothing; we shall soon be down to the bare truth. If it hadn't been for these last admissions

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of yours, I don't know what I should have done. They were a perfect inspiration. I'll tell you what, Roberts! I believe you can manage this business twice as well without me. But you must keep your eye out for the cook! You mustn't let any respectable butter-ball leave the room without asking her if she's the one. You'll know how to put it more delicately now. And I won't complicate you with McIlheny any more. I'll just step out here—"

Roberts: "No, no, no! You mustn't go, Willis. You mustn't indeed! I shouldn't know what to do with that tipsy nuisance. Ah, here he comes again!"

Campbell, cheerily, to the approaching McIlheny: "I hope you didn't lose your train, Mr. McIlheny!"

McIlheny, darkly: "Never moind my thrain, sor! My wife says it was a put-up jahb between ye. She says ye were afther laughun', and lukun' and winkun' at her before this mahn stipped up to spake to her. Now what do ye make of that?"

Campbell: "We were laughing, of

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course. I had been laughing at my friend's predicament, in being left to meet a lady he'd never seen before. You laughed at it yourself."

McIlheny: "I did, sor."

Roberts, basely truckling to him: "It was certainly a ludicrous position."

Campbell: "And when we explained it, it amused your good lady too. She laughed as much as yourself—"

McIlheny: "She did, sor. Ye're right. Sure it would make a cow laugh. Well, gintlemen, ye must excuse me. Mrs. McIlheny says I mustn't stop for the next thrain, and I'll have to ask you to join me in that glass of wine some other toime."

Campbell: "Oh, it's all right, Mr. McIlheny. You've only got about half a minute." He glances at the clock, and McIlheny runs out, profusely waving his hand in adieu.

Roberts, taking out his handkerchief and wiping his forehead: "Well, thank Heaven! we're rid of him at last."

Campbell: "I'm not so sure of that. He'll probably miss the train. You may

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be sure Mrs. McIlheny is waiting for him outside of it, and then we shall have them both on our hands indefinitely. We shall have to explain and explain. Fiction has entirely failed us, and I feel that the truth is giving way under our feet. I'll tell you what, Roberts!"

Roberts, in despair: "What?"

Campbell: "Why, if McIlheny should happen to come back alone, we mustn't wait for him to renew his invitation to drink; we must take him out ourselves, and get him drunk; so drunk he can't remember anything; stone drunk; dead drunk. Or, that is, *you* must. I haven't got anything to do with him. I wash my hands of the whole affair."

Roberts: "You mustn't, Willis! You know I can't manage without you. And you know I can't take the man out and get him drunk. I couldn't. I shouldn't feel that it was right."

Campbell: "Yes, I know. You'd have to drink with him; and you've got no head at all. You'd probably get drunk first, and I don't know what I should say to Agnes."

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Roberts: "That isn't the point, Willis. I couldn't ask the man to drink; I should consider it immoral. Besides, what should you do if the cook came while I was away? You wouldn't know her."

Campbell: "Well, neither would you, if you stayed."

Roberts: "That's true. There doesn't seem to be any end of it, or any way out of it. I must just stay and bear it."

Campbell: "Of *course* you must stay. And when McIlheny comes back, you'd better ask him out to look upon the wine when it is red."

Roberts: "No; that's impossible, quite. I shouldn't mind the association—though it isn't very pleasant; but to offer drink to a man already—. Do you suppose it would do to ask him out for a glass of soda? Plain soda would be good for him. Or I could order claret in it, if the worst came to the worst."

Campbell: "Claret! What Mr. McIlheny requires is forty-rod whiskey in a solution of sulphuric acid. You must take that, or fourth-proof brandy straight, with him."

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Roberts, miserably: "I couldn't; you know I couldn't."

Campbell: "What are you going to do, then?"

Roberts: "I don't know; I don't know. I—I'll give him in charge to a policeman."

Campbell: "And make a scandal here?"

Roberts: "Of course it can't be done!"

Campbell: "Of *course* it can't. Give a councilman in charge? The policeman will be Irish too, and then what'll you do? You're more likely to be carried off yourself, when the facts are explained. They'll have an ugly look in the police report."

Roberts: "Oh, it can't be done! Nothing can be done! I wish Agnes would come!"

The Colored Man who calls the Trains: "Cars ready for South Framingham, Whitneys, East Holliston, Holliston, Metcalf's, Braggville, and Milford. Express to Framingham. Milford Branch. Track No. 3."

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V

MRS. ROBERTS, MRS. CAMPBELL, ROBERTS, AND CAMPBELL; THEN THE COOK AND McILHENY

Mrs. Roberts, rushing in and looking about in a flutter, till she discovers her husband: "Good gracious, Edward! Is that our train? I ran all the way from the station door as fast as I could run, and I'm perfectly out of breath. Did you ever hear of anything like my meeting Amy on the very instant? She was getting out of her coupé just as I was getting out of mine, and I saw her the first thing as soon as I looked up. It was the most wonderful chance. And the moment we pushed our way through the door and got inside the outer hall, I heard the man calling the train—he calls so distinctly—and I told her I was sure it was our train; and then we just simply flew, both of us. I had the greatest time getting my plush bag. They were all locked up at Stearns's as tight as a

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drum, but I saw somebody inside, moving about, and I rattled the door, and made signs till he came; and then I said I had left my plush bag; and he said it was against the rules, and I'd have to come Monday; and I told him I knew it was, and I didn't expect him to transgress the rules, but I wished very much to have my plush bag, because there were some things in it that I wished to have, as well as my purse; for I'd brought away my keys in it; and I knew Willis — how d'ye do, Willis? — would want wine with his dinner, and you'd have to break the closet open if I didn't get the key; and so he said he would see if the person who kept the picked-up things was there yet; and it turned out he was, and he asked me for a description of the bag and its contents; and I described them all, down to the very last thing; and he said I had the greatest memory he ever saw. And now I think everything is going off perfectly, and I shall be able to show Amy that there's something inland as well as at the seaside. Why don't you speak to her, Ed-

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ward? What is the matter? What are you looking at?" She detects him in the act of craning his neck to this side and that, and peering over people's heads and shoulders in the direction of the door. "Hasn't Norah—Bridget, I mean—come yet?" She frowns significantly, and cautions him concerning Mrs. Campbell by pressing her finger to her lip.

Roberts: "Yes—yes, she's here; I suppose she's—she's here. How do you do, Amy? So glad—" He continues his furtive inspection of the door-way, and Willis turns away with a snicker.

Mrs. Campbell: "Willis, what are you laughing at? Is there anything wrong with my bonnet? Agnes, *is* there? He would let me go about looking like a perfect auk. Did I bang it getting out of the coupé. Do tell me, Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts, to her husband: "You don't mean to say you haven't *seen* her yet?"

Roberts, desperately: "Seen her? How should I know whether I've seen her? I never saw her in my life."

Mrs. Roberts: "Then what are you looking for, in that way?"

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Roberts: "I—I'm looking for her husband."

Mrs. Roberts: "Her husband?"

Roberts: "Yes. He keeps coming back." Campbell bursts into a wild shriek of laughter.

Mrs. Roberts, imploringly: "Willis, what *does* it mean?"

Mrs. Campbell, threateningly: "Willis, if you don't behave yourself—"

Mrs. Roberts, with the calm of despair: "Well, then, she isn't coming! She's given us the slip! I might have known it! Well, the cat might as well come out of the bag first as last, Amy, though I was trying to keep it in, to spare your feelings; I knew you'd be so full of sympathy." Suddenly to her husband: "But if you saw her husband— Did he say she sent him? I didn't dream of her being married. How do you know it's her husband?"

Roberts: "Because—because she went out and got him! Don't I tell you?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Went out and got him?"

Roberts: "When I spoke to her."

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"'This is one of your tricks, Willis—one of your vile practical jokes!'"

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Mrs. Roberts: "When you spoke to her? But you said you didn't see her!"

Roberts: "Of *course* I didn't see her. How should I see her, when I never saw her before? I went up and spoke to her, and she said she wasn't the one. She was very angry, and she went out and got her husband. He was tipsy, and he's been coming back ever since. I don't know what to do about the wretched creature. He says I've insulted his abominable wife!"

Campbell, laughing: "O Lord! Lord! This will be the death of me!"

Mrs. Campbell: "This is one of your tricks, Willis; one of your vile practical jokes."

Campbell: "No, no, my dear! I couldn't invent anything equal to *this*. Oh my! oh my!"

Mrs. Campbell, seizing him by the arm: "Well, if you don't tell, instantly, what it is—"

Campbell: "But I *can't* tell. I promised Roberts I wouldn't."

Roberts, wildly: "Oh, tell, tell!"

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Campbell: "About the cook, too, Agnes?"

Mrs. Roberts: "Yes, yes; everything! Only tell!"

Campbell, struggling to recover himself: "Why, you see, Agnes engaged a cook, up-town—"

Mrs. Roberts: "I didn't want you to know it, Amy. I thought you would be troubled if you knew you were coming to visit me just when I was trying to break in a new cook, and so I told Edward not to let Willis know. Go on, Willis."

Mrs. Campbell: "And I understand just how you felt about it, Agnes; you knew he'd laugh. Go on, Willis."

Campbell: "And she sent her down here, and told Roberts to keep her till she came herself."

Both Ladies: "Well?"

Campbell: "And I found poor old Roberts here, looking out for a cook that he'd never seen before, and expecting to recognize a woman that he'd never met in his life." He explodes in another fit of laughter. The ladies stare at him in mystification.

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Mrs. Roberts: "I would have stayed myself to meet her, but I'd left my plush bag with my purse in it at Stearns's, and I had to go back after it."

Mrs. Campbell: "She *had* to leave him. What is there to laugh at?"

Mrs. Roberts: "I see nothing to laugh at, Willis."

Campbell, sobered: "You *don't?*"

Both Ladies: "No."

Campbell: "Well, by Jove! Then perhaps you don't see anything to laugh at in Roberts's having to guess who the cook was; and going up to the wrong woman, and her getting mad, and going out and bringing back her little fiery-red tipsy Irishman of a husband, that wanted to fight Roberts; and my having to lie out of it for him; and their going off again, and the husband coming back four or five times between drinks, and having to be smoothed up each time—"

Both Ladies: "No!"

Mrs. Roberts: "It was simply horrid."

Mrs. Campbell: "It wasn't funny at all; it was simply disgusting. Poor Mr. Roberts!"

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Campbell: "Well, by the holy poker! This knocks me out! The next time I'll marry a man, and have somebody around that can appreciate a joke. The Irishman said himself it would make a cow laugh."

Mrs. Campbell: "I congratulate you on being of the same taste, Willis. And I dare say you tried to heighten the absurdity, and add to poor Mr. Roberts's perplexity."

Roberts: "No, no! I assure you, Amy, if it hadn't been for Willis, I shouldn't have known how to manage. I was quite at my wits' end."

Mrs. Campbell: "You are very generous, I'm sure, Mr. Roberts; and I suppose I shall have to believe *you*."

Roberts: "But I couldn't act upon the suggestion to take the man out and treat him; Willis was convinced himself, I think, that that wouldn't do. But I confess I was tempted."

Mrs. Roberts: "Treat him?"

Roberts: "Yes. He was rather tipsy already; and Willis thought he would be more peaceable perhaps if we could get

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him quite drunk; but I really couldn't bring my mind to it, though I was so distracted that I was on the point of yielding."

Both Ladies: "Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts: "You wanted poor Edward to go out and drink with that wretched being, so as to get him into a still worse state?"

Mrs. Campbell: "You suggested that poor Mr. Roberts should do such a thing as that? Well, Willis!"

Mrs. Roberts: "Well, Willis!" She turns from him more in sorrow than in anger, and confronts a cook-like person of comfortable bulk, with a bundle in her hand, and every mark of hurry and exhaustion in her countenance. "Why, here's Bridget now!"

The Cook: "Maggie, mem! I was afraid I was after missun' you, after all. I couldn't see the gentleman anywhere, and I've been runnun' up and down the depot askun' fur um; and at last, thinks I, I'll try the ladies' room; and sure enough here ye was yourself. It was lucky I thought of it."

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Mrs. Roberts: "Oh! I forgot to tell you he'd be in the ladies' room. But it's all right now, Maggie; and we've just got time to catch our train."

Campbell, bitterly: "Well, Agnes, for a woman that's set so many people by the ears, you let yourself up pretty easily. By Jove! here comes that fellow back again!" They all mechanically shrink aside, and leave Roberts exposed to the approach of McIlheny.

McIlheny: "Now, sor, me thrain's gahn, and we can talk this little matter oover at our aise. What did ye mane, sor, by comin' up to the Hannorable Mrs. Michael McIlheny and askun' her if she was a cuke? Did she luke like a person that 'd demane herself to a manial position like that? Her that never put her hands in wather, and had hilpers to milk her father's cows? What did ye mane, sor? Did she luke like a lady, or did she luke like a cuke? Tell me that!"

The Cook, bursting upon him from behind Roberts, who eagerly gives place to her: "*I'll* tell ye that meself, ye impidint felly! What's to kape a cuke from lukun'

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"'Sure I wonder what Mary 'll be wantun' me to ask um next?'"

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like a lady, or a lady from lukun' like a cuke? Ah, Mike McIlheny, ye drunken blaggurd, is it *me* ye're tellin' that Mary Molloy never put her hands in wather, and kept hilpers to milk her father's cows! Cows indade! It was wan pig under the bed; and more shame to them that's ashamed to call it a pig, if ye *are* my cousin! *I'm* the lady the gentleman was lukin' for, and if ye think I'm not as good as Mary Molloy the best day she ever stipped, I'll thank ye to tell me who is. Be off wid ye, or I'll say something ye'll not like to hear!"

McIlheny: "Sure I was jokin', Maggie! I was goun' to tell the gintleman that if he was lukun' for a cuke, I'd a cousin out of place that was the best professed cuke in Bahston. And I'm glad he's got ye: and he's a gintleman every inch, and so's his lady, I dar' say, though I haven't the pleasure of her acquaintance—"

The Colored Man who calls the Trains: "Cars ready for West Newton, Auburndale, Riverside, Wellesley, Natick, and South Framingham. Train for South

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Framingham. Express to West Newton. Track No. 5."

Mrs. Roberts: "That's our train, Amy! We get off at Auburndale. Willis, Edward, Maggie—come!" They all rush out, leaving McIlheny alone.

McIlheny, looking thoughtfully after them: "Sure, I wonder what Mary'll be wantun' me to ask um next!"

THE END

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